DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 211 EC 300 884

AUTHOR Berkay, Paul J.
TITLE A Proposed Model for a Deaf Employment Task Force in a Major Corporation.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness (21st, Charleston, SC, November 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Business; *Committees; *Deafness; *Employer Employee Relationship; *Employment Programs; *Labor Relations; *Personnel Integration; Personnel Policy; Quality of Working Life; Staff Development

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Deaf Employment Task Force established at a Fortune 500 corporation in Southern California and proposes a model for developing such a task force at other corporations. The task force consisted of an average of 15 managerial and professional individuals, representatives of a deaf employee support group, and a deaf employment specialist. The task force established the following projects during its first year: a research program on vocational testing for assembly positions; hiring of a full time certified interpreter for the deaf; presentation of deaf awareness workshops; establishment of a monthly deaf support group; and provision of an American Sign Language Course. Additional projects were proposed or began development. Communication with management was found most effective when concern for the corporation (such as concern for litigation and adverse publicity) was the main emphasis. Also effective was gradual involvement of deaf individuals on the Task Force to minimize resistance of hearing members. The proposed model presents 18 recommended components such as sanctioning of the Task Force by upper management, addressing legal requirements, inviting deaf employee participation, leadership of the Task Force by an individual knowledgeable about the deaf culture, and avoidance by deaf Task Force members of controversial activities. Includes 7 references. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED341211

EC

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A Proposed Model for a Deaf Employment Task Force in a Major Corporation

Paul J. Berkay, M.S., Presenter

California State University Long Beach

EC 300884

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Paul J. Berkay

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

The purpose of this article was to present additional information on a previously published case study of a Deaf Employment Task Force established in a Fortune 500 corporation. The Task Force was composed of representatives from departments that impacted successful deaf employment. The development of the Task Force over a one-year period was described by the author in a previous study. New information presented in this study includes descriptions of projects that were proposed, established, or in development during this organization's existence. Also described were some of the interpersonal dynamics involved, such as the political activism of deaf professionals on the Task Force and approaches to motivate management to action. Based on this experience, the author proposed a model for a Deaf Employment Task Force in a major corporation.

A Proposed Model for a Deaf Employment Task Force in a Major Corporation

> In late 1989, a company-wide Deaf Employment Task Force was established at a Fortune 500 Corporation in Southern California. Approximately two dozen of the company's 50,000 employees were identified as hearing impaired. In the year that followed, a wide array of programs, research projects, and services aimed at enhancing the employment conditions of deaf persons were in development or had been established. (Berkay, 1991, p. 81)

The author previously described the development of the Deaf Employment Task Force over a one-year period (Berkay, 1991). The purpose of this study was to expand on the original description with additional information. A secondary purpose was to propose a model for a Deaf Employment Task Force in a major corporation based on this experience. It is hoped that this model will benefit other individuals attempting to establish similar task forces in corporate environments.

The Task Force

The Deaf Employment Task Force (Task Force) was developed through the company's Behavioral Assessment Center. The author, an employee of the Center, assumed the responsibility of adapting a group behavioral exercise for deaf job applicants. During this development, it was determined that a company-wide, systematic intervention program would be necessary to improve conditions for deaf employees. Adapting the employment assessment was only one small component of a large program. Other components considered important were (a) recruitment issues, (b) deaf awareness education, (c) adaptive devices, (d) support services, (e) adaptation of training courses, and (f) identification of positions without speech or hearing requirements. Managers from departments impacting these areas were invited to join the Deaf Employment Task Force, which met every two weeks at the Behavioral Assessment Center.

> The Task Force was established with representatives from seven departments: (a) behavioral assessment, (b) vocational assessment from a local community college, (c) legal department, (d) equal opportunity program (EOP), (e) general employment, (f) professional employment, and (g) technical development. An average of 15 individuals made up the Task Force membership at any given time. Some of the representatives were managers, while others were deaf professionals in non-management positions. Additional membership included two representatives from a deaf employee support group and a deaf employment specialist from a local agency. (Berkay, 1991, p. 81)

The following projects were proposed, established, or in development during this organization's first year of existence:

Proposed

1. Company-wide sign language courses were proposed.

2. A proposal was made to develop a hiring process for deaf applicants.

3. It was proposed that all job descriptions for assembly positions be reviewed to determine whether requirements for speech and hearing were valid.

Established

1. Research was conducted on existing vocational testing for assembly positions. The company was using English and Math skills tests and a computer-generated vocational assessment test. Based on legal and vocational research and the opinions of deaf professionals, testing was eventually discontinued for all deaf applicants.

2. A full-time Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certified interpreter was hired to serve the company's deaf employee population.

3. Deaf awareness workshops were presented to co-workers and supervisors of deaf employees by a hard-of-hearing representative from a local deaf services agency. Human Resources representatives were also included in this training.

4. A monthly deaf support group, co-facilitated by two deaf employees, was established to address issues of hearing-impaired employment within the company.

5. A pilot American Sign Language course was conducted by a deaf employee for approximately 20 staff members in the Behavioral Assessment Center.

In Development

1. Research was conducted on alternate valid deaf vocational testing.

2. Academic remediation programs at local community colleges were identified for individual deaf applicants who failed to pass vocational testing. The goal of this project was to establish a company policy that would determine an appropriate referral.

3. A behavioral group exercise based on the Assessment Center model was in development for use with deaf general-employment applicants (a corporate term for blue-collar applicants). Several trials were conducted with deaf employees serving as subjects.

Several individuals were involved in the development of the above projects. Though some worked together in a positive manner, others interacted negatively, which had the unanticipated effect of undermining the success of the program goals. The following 5 sections describe interpersonal dynamics and interactions of those involved with the Deaf Employment Task Force: (a) Motivation for Action, (b) Deaf Members on the Task Force, (c) Involvement of Deaf Individuals on Special Projects, (d) Deaf Support Group, and (e) Political Activism.

Motivation for Action

When the Task Force was established, a major effort was made to convince the management members that changes in the company's current deaf employment practices were necessary. Finding the correct approach to motivate management members to action was a great challenge. The following approaches were utilized by deaf professionals on the Task Force or deaf employees within the company with varying degrees of success:

1. Emotional Plea - This approach, which involves relating emotional stories of the struggles of deaf employees, is calculated to appeal to the listener's sense of humanity, guilt, or societal obligation. A few deaf professionals used this tactic to the discomfort of management on the Task Force. Emotional outbursts at business meetings seemed inappropriate and unprofessional. It became apparent that the managers were concerned that if changes were not made, these same individuals might make similar emotional pleas to the press.

2. Threatening - This approach involves the threatening of legal action and adverse publicity if demands are unmet. This tactic was not used by the deaf professionals on the Task Force. An employee within the company tried this approach, although no action was taken as a result of his

demands. In general, it may be concluded that managers are not particularly responsive to threats.

3. Concern for the Corporation - The author discovered that the most effective approach was to express concern for the corporation. It was explained to management that inequitable practices with deaf employees could put the company at risk for litigation or adverse publicity. The citing of examples of negative consequences experienced by other corporations committing similar actions was crucial to this method. This approach earned the trust of management and allowed the author access to highly sensitive materials related to deaf employment. As a result, decisions were made upon advice of deaf professionals that benefitted the deaf population of this corporation.

After observing reactions and responses of management when faced with deaf employment issues, it appeared that concern for litigation and adverse publicity was a major contributing force in driving management to action and change.

Deaf Members on the Task Force

Shortly after the first meeting, the author had proposed inviting deaf employees to join the Task Force. This suggestion was met with great resistance by management members. Those in opposition expressed concern that hearing members could not openly discuss their feelings about deafness with deaf members present. There was also a belief that deaf members would leak sensitive information to their company peers or generate protest when demands were unmet.

After 11 meetings, a deaf woman, who represented the company's deaf employee support group, was allowed to appear for the purpose of reporting that group's activities. This appearance was allowed with the provision that she leave immediately after her presentation. This individual was tactful and articulate. The Task Force management members were impressed with her professionalism, and she was invited to become a regular member of this organization. After the first deaf employee was accepted on the Task Force, a second deaf employee was invited by the author without the permission of the other members. No one complained or protested. Shortly thereafter, a deaf man, who served as a deaf recruitment specialist at an outside agency, became a regular Task Force member. The presence of these three hearing-impaired individuals and their interpreter added a dimension of reality about deafness for those Task Force members who had not previously communicated with deaf people.

Involvement of Deaf Individuals on Special Projects

The author firmly believes that deaf individuals should be involved in projects and decisions that affect their lives. Their expertise and knowledge in deaf culture should be listened to with great care. With this idea in mind, five deaf employees and five hearing-impaired deaf professionals from outside agencies were involved in the planning and execution of many of the projects and programs previously outlined. One of the most successful elements of this Task Force was the fact that deaf and hearing individuals were working toward common goals.

Deaf Support Group

A monthly deaf employee support group was established and co-facilitated by the two deaf employees who eventually became members of the Task Force. They provided a valuable link to the deaf support group and the Task Force. The needs of the deaf employees were presented by these two deaf representatives to members of the Task Force. Task Force members could respond to concerns from the deaf employee population and disseminate company-related information to them through their two representatives. In this way management could be more responsive to the needs of the deaf employees, while these employees could be better informed about activities and policies affecting their employment.

Political Activism

The author realized that his participation in political activism on behalf of the deaf employee population could jeopardize his position with company management. At one point, the deaf population was distributing a petition to improve interpreting services, and this author declined his signature. He politely explained that although he sympathized with their dilemma, management would not tolerate his involvement. This honest explanation was readily accepted by the petition's distributor. When the circulation of the petition became an issue of company policy violation, the author had remained uninvolved and had avoided negative feelings from both the deaf employees and management.

The Model

Based on the experiences in this and the original study (Berkay, 1991), the author proposed a model for a Deaf Employment Task Force in a major corporation. The components included in this model are as follows:

1. The goal of the Deaf Employment Task Force is to generate a systematic intervention to improve the quality of deaf employment in the company. Although discussion is necessary, this group should be focused on action and change.

2. The establishment of the Task Force should be sanctioned from upper management at the vice president level or above. Upper management could request by memo that all departments impacting deaf employment participate in the Task Force by sending representatives to the meetings.

3. Early in the group's development, a charter should be submitted to the appropriate department so that the Task Force will become an official entity of the company.

4. The Task Force should publicize itself through articles in the company newsletter. This will make the organization's presence known.

5. Representatives from the following departments impacting deaf employment should serve on the Task Force: Assessment, Training, Medical, Security, Legal, Equal Opportunity (or Affirmative Action), General Employment, Professional Employment, and Job Analysis. (Note: Appropriate departments and their titles may vary from company to company.)

6. An initial meeting should be set up with managers from each department mentioned above. After the first meeting, each manager can send a representative from their department to attend on a regular basis. Each representative should be a high level person, such as an assistant, and not a clerical aide. This person should have a reasonably flexible schedule that would permit the performance of Task Force functions and allow for attendance at all meetings.

7. The Task Force should meet every two weeks in order to keep members informed of projects in progress.

8. At the first or second meeting, a company attorney should speak to the group on the legal requirements of

accommodating deaf individuals. The Americans with Disabilities Act could be discussed at length. Possible consequences for non-adherence to fair employment practices could also be mentioned. This information will hopefully provide motivation for involvement by the managers on the Task Force.

9. After the first meeting, a deaf awareness workshop can be conducted for all Task Force managers and their representatives. This should be conducted separately from the Task Force meetings. The workshop will help to reduce the necessity to answer management's deaf-related questions during the meetings, leaving time for action-oriented discussion.

10. Deaf employees should be invited to become regular members during the first few weeks of this organization's establishment. If hearing members are resistant, deaf members can be phased in slowly. They could appear at the beginning of meetings as guest speakers and eventually become full-fledged members.

11. All regular members should be deaf professionals, deaf employees, or those managers or their representatives who can bring about action and change. Hearing members from outside agencies can be included as guest speakers on occasion. Including these individuals as full-fledged members will interfere with the action-oriented nature of this group.

12. The Shared Responsibility model previously described by the author (Berkay, 1991) should be adhered to in the assignment of duties. Those with expertise in the field of deafness could assist and advise the Task Force managers and their representatives on projects for their departments. Although active involvement is acceptable, the deaf employee members and deaf professionals should not assume <u>full</u> responsibility for functions outside of their job descriptions.

13. Minutes should be drafted for each meeting. They should include a complete list of action items with names of individuals responsible for their completion. Action items should be reviewed in front of the group toward the conclusion of each meeting. Those responsible should report on progress for each item. In order to allow ample time for completion of action items, minutes should be delivered to Task Force members within a few days following each meeting.

14. A deaf support group could be established by deaf employees within the company. Representatives from this group could be invited to join the Deaf Employment Task Force. This will facilitate communication between management and the company's deaf employees.

15. In order to establish credibility with management and the deaf employee population, the administrator or leader of the Task Force should be someone who signs and has knowledge of the deaf culture.

16. An interpreter should be present at all times when deaf members are in attendance. When Task Force members attempt to interpret, their focus is pulled away from the business at hand. Those hearing members who sign should sign for themselves and should inform the interpreter ahead of time of this intention.

17. Deaf professionals and deaf members on the Task Force should avoid controversial activity within the company, such as signing petitions. Management can be approached to make changes in a non-threatening manner. Expressing concern for the welfare of the company is the best approach. The Deaf professionals should present themselves as loyal employees who wish to do their part to prevent the company from experiencing litigation or adverse publicity. Threats or emotional pleas for humanitarian action should be considered ineffective and should be avoided at all costs.

18. Although research and development is important, the Task Force should attempt to achieve tangible, concrete, company-wide results that can be used to justify the group's continued existence.

Discussion

The establishment of a Deaf Employment Task Force in a large corporation is a major undertaking that requires considerable thought and planning. Before initiating such an endeavor, it is important to consider the company's unique deaf employment needs and its past history of serving a deaf population.

The above case study is but one example from one corporation. It is hoped that other deaf professionals will report on similar experiences in order to further the research and development in this field. In addition, a national network of members in this specialized profession could be formed in order to improve the deaf employment situation across the country.

Reference and Bibliography

Berkay, P. J. (1991). The establishment of a deaf employment task force in a major corporation. Journal of the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association, 24(3 & 4), 81-85.

Foster, S. (1987). Social alienation and peer identification: A dialectical model of the development of deaf community. Rochester, NY: Rochester Institute of Technology, National Technical Institute for the Deaf. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 296 518)

Nester, M. A. (1984). Employment testing for handicapped persons. Public Personnel Management Journal, 13(4), 417-434.

Rochester Institute of Technology, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, National Center on Employment of the Deaf. (1986). Working together: Deaf and hearing people. Rochester, NY: Author.

Steffanic, D. J. (1982). Reasonable accommodation for deaf employees in white collar jobs (OPRD Report No. 82-6). Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Office of Personnel Research and Development.

U. S. Congress. (1990). Americans with Disabilities Act. U. S. Code Congressional and administrative news: 101st Congress. 2nd session. 104 stat. Public Law 101-322 (pp. 327-377). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Zieziula, F. R. (Ed.). (1982). Assessment of hearing-impaired people: A guide for selecting psychological, educational, and vocational tests. Washington, DC: Gallaudet College Press.